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Cuba Intensifies Aid To Rebels in 3 Latin Nations, CIA Reports

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WASHINGTON — Encouraged by the upheaval in Nicaragua, Cuba recently has "intensified" its efforts to aid left-wing rebels in their attempts to overthrow three Central American governments, according to unconfirmed U.S. intelligence reports.

Those efforts, the Central Intelligence Agency reported in a secret May 2 memorandum, "reflect a far more sophisticated and selective revolutionary doctrine than that which guided Cuba's action in the 1960s."

"Cuba clearly ... wants to avoid provoking a U.S. counter-response," the memo added.

THAT ASSESSMENT of Cuba's renewed interest in promoting leftist revolutions in Central America — especially in Nicaragua, but also in Guatemala and El Salvador — is contained in the classified memorandum entitled "Cuban Support for Central American Guerrilla Groups."

The CIA sent copies of the 10-page document to State Department and other government officials. At the time, Cuba's role in aiding the Nicaraguan Sandinista rebels, using Panama as an intermediary, had been noted in congressional debate over the Panama Canal treaties.

State Department spokesman Tom Reston confirmed the report's CIA origin. However, he and others familiar with it stress that its findings are based upon "raw intelligence" that has not been verified.

Nevertheless, knowledgeable government sources have told The Herald that the memorandum's findings are consistent with other information received in recent months.

THE CIA REPORT outlines what it sees as a new Cuban strategy in exporting its revolution to other Latin American countries.

Gone is what one source called the "frontal assault" strategy of Cuban revolutionary Ernesto (Che) Guevara in the 1960s. Guevara led a small, Cuban-directed guerrilla movement in Bolivia in the mistaken belief that the populace would join the uprising.

The new strategy takes a more pragmatic view of conditions than did Guevara, who was killed by Bolivian counterinsurgency forces in 1967.

The CIA report notes that now Cuba is most willing to provide indirect assistance to rebels.

Most of this assistance comes in the form of training, although the CIA said that Cuba, with Panamanian help, also has provided guns and other weapons to the Sandinistas.

IN ALL THREE countries, the CIA memorandum says, Cuba has attempted to downplay its involvement — and thereby run less risk of provoking the United States — by funneling its aid through intermediaries and refusing to provide any direct military assistance.

Cuba also is conditioning its help to El Salvadorean and Guatemalan rebels on their promises to form coalitions "with other opposition groups. Cuba now believes that these coalitions have a better chance of succeeding than do even highly disciplined guerrilla groups," the report says.

The memorandum says Cuba applied this strategy with great success in Nicaragua. Until recently, despite widespread opposition to the government of President Anastasio Somoza, the anti-government forces had been splintered.

HOWEVER, the CIA says, Cuban President Fidel Castro summoned the Sandinista guerrilla leaders to Havana in March and, during a 48-hour meeting, got them to put aside differences and form a coalition to include any group intent upon ousting Somoza.

To help solidify that coalition, Castro promised stepped-up aid to the rebels as long as they cooperated with each other, according to the memorandum.

The CIA also says Castro urged the Sandinistas to "play down the Marxist nature of their programs at this point and to offer to join non-Marxists in forging a broad coalition."

The Sandinista Marxists "have taken steps to comply with the request," the memorandum says.

Two weeks ago — in a move that demonstrated this further — the Sandinistas announced formation of a relatively broad-based "Government of National Reconstruction" that includes both leftist and moderate anti-Somoza groups.

IMPLICIT IN THIS "low-key" approach is Cuba's apparent belief that events are working against the governments in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, according to the memorandum.

In the three countries, it says, Cuba has urged the rebel groups to prepare for a prolonged civil war while avoiding direct clashes with government troops.

As in Nicaragua, Cuba theorizes that public sentiment ultimately will shift in favor of the insurgents, the CIA report says.

The memorandum, citing "several sources," says Cuba, "on at least two and possibly three occasions," supplied arms to the Nicaraguan rebels.

Those arms were ferried aboard Panamanian air force planes to airfields in Costa Rica for shipment to the guerrillas, the report said.

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